

Delaware ranks third in the nation in FAFSA completion

Delaware students and families rank third in the nation in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, according to new data released by the [. Completion rates serve as early indicators of post-secondary access and success.](#)

The increase, from 4th place in 2018, results from a statewide effort to help families understand and complete FAFSA. Delaware's FAFSA completion is top in the nation behind Tennessee and Louisiana.

In partnership with the Delaware Department of Education, \$tand By Me provided 218 workshops to 6,798 families during the 2018-2019 school year. Some workshops include hands-on assistance while families completed the form online at school. \$tand By Me is a joint project of Delaware Department of Health and Social Services and *United Way* of Delaware, addressing Delaware's economic challenges and its goals to increase educational outcomes, affordable housing and home ownership, and financial stability.

"Financial aid is an important factor affecting students college enrollment, and we want families to have the support they need to overcome any fiscal hurdles," Secretary of Education Susan Bunting said.

\$tand By Me has been working with the Department of Education since 2015 to help all high school seniors have a funding strategy to pay for college.

"We've worked hard to partner with every high school in the state and provide hands-on workshops on scholarships and financial aid," said Sally Coonin, director of the \$tand By Me College Funding Project.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 90 percent of students who complete a FAFSA application will enroll in college.

Coonin said many families don't know how much free money is available for college. For instance, Federal Student Aid, part of the U.S. Department of Education, provides more than \$120 billion in federal grants, loans and work-study funds each year to more than 13 million students paying for college or career school.

To be considered for federal aid, students must complete a FAFSA form, available starting Oct. 1 of each year. In addition to federal student aid, colleges, states and private scholarship organizations also use or require FAFSA to process their awards.

"One of the biggest and most important investments that families can make today is in their children's college education," Department of Health and Social Services Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker said. "The outreach that \$tand By Me provides to high school seniors and their families in navigating the complex world of federal financial aid is critical to reducing long-term debt and having a successful college experience."

By failing to complete FAFSA American students left an estimated \$2.6 billion on the table in unclaimed Pell Grants in 2018 alone. Those grants could have been used to cover the cost of attendance at many institutions across the country.

“We’re very proud of this statewide initiative to help families avoid debt and find ways to pursue a post-secondary education. It’s a great example of partnership at its best,” President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way of Delaware Michelle Taylor said.

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